

June 2009

LOVE: SAVING THE WORLD ONE PERSON AT A TIME

Fellow Pilgrims:

The *Talmud* is the Jewish commentary on the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible. The Talmud says that when one saves one person, one saves the world. When one destroys one person one destroys the world. I recently returned from a trip to Europe with Gail, my wife. No matter where we were, I was reminded of this Talmudic saying. Why was this?

No matter where we were in France, Belgium, or the Netherlands, there were memorials to the dead in World War I and World War II. However, the names listed were not just uniformed soldiers. There were the names of the resistance fighters who lost their lives. There were also the names, or if too many, the numbers of the people deported to slave labor camps and concentration camps: Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, and Auschwitz to name but a few. Dachau was the first camp, set up in 1934 just after Hitler took power.

We were in Düsseldorf on April 21. In the Old City (*Alte Stadt*) there was a ceremony of remembrance. The Jewish community started reading the names of all those who were deported to death camps from the Düsseldorf area. They started reading names continuously at 2:00 pm and were still going strong at 4:00. We watched and paid our respects from about 3:30 to 4:00. It was staggering—all those individuals and futures destroyed.

From the beginning, the Nazi regime declared a war of extermination against Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, Gypsies, people with physical or mental disabilities, and enemies of the state. These memorials reminded me of the systematic, government-led murder of people considered not fully human. This was paralleled by the state-led exterminations of people by Joseph Stalin in the USSR and later under Mao Tse-tung in mainland China. Unfortunately this type of genocide is still going on today in various parts of the world.

What does Jesus say about love and saving a person? Remember, He called His disciples one at a time. We are saved one at a time. We are saved by one person, Jesus Christ. "Yes, God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not be lost but may have eternal life." (John 3:16) Jesus commanded us to love God and to love our neighbor. But at the end of His life, He gave us another commandment: "This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." (John 15: 12-14)

When we were in the Normandy region, people remembered the sacrifices of the Allies to liberate France. We were thanked multiple times for America coming to the aid of France. They honor the memory of the thousands of men and women who laid down their lives for the peoples suffering under Nazi oppression. At the American cemetery, one of

the film documents the lives of some of those who died. We heard their letters home, saw photos of them and their families, and witnessed recollections of them by survivors. This film and the hall of remembrance, which recites the names of the dead, put human faces on the thousands of crosses and stars of David in the cemetery. They put their lives on the line to free an oppressed people and paid the ultimate sacrifice. As Jesus said, they had no greater love than to lay down their lives.

Where do you see love in your life? Pray to become a lover, saving the world one person at a time. The time to love is now, and the need is great. Evil and suffering are not dead. The struggle in our lives and in the spiritual realm is not finished, even though Jesus has won for us the ultimate victory. Will you answer the call to love? After all, if not you, who? If not now, when? If not here, where? Remember this prayer: "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created and You shall renew the face of the earth. Help me to love as Jesus loved and give me the will to love. Amen."

In Christ's love,
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Spiritual Director